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Chairperson: Ms. Loudoño (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Colombia)

Contents

Agenda item 113: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 113: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/58/272, A/58/282, A/58/328, A/58/329 and A/58/420)

1. **Mr. Djangone-Bi** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that his delegation was very concerned about the issues of child labour and child slavery, which affected third-world countries in general and West Africa in particular, owing to the instability that had existed in the region for more than a decade. In the past, child labour had been a form of apprenticeship and a way for children to help their parents with work at home or in the fields. However, it had now become a criminal activity at both the national and the international level and needed to be tackled as rigorously as other crimes.

2. In response to a recent campaign in which it had been accused of practising or turning a blind eye to the shameful activity of child slavery, Côte d'Ivoire had authorized two investigations which had been carried out in February and March 2000 by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). His Government had already adopted specific measures to combat the problem. Awareness campaigns had been carried out across the country through the media and the Ministry of the Family, Women and Children. In 2001, a national action plan had been approved following the participation of Côte d'Ivoire in the subregional meetings held in Cotonou in 1998 and Libreville and Lomé in 2000. Furthermore, his Government and the Ministry of the Family, Women and Children had asked for the international community's help in combating that scourge. The legal framework had also been strengthened: article 6 of the Constitution laid down special protection for the most vulnerable, including children, while the Labour Code set the minimum age at 14 and prohibited under-18-year-olds from doing night work.

3. His Government had signed subregional cooperation agreements with Mali and Burkina Faso in a move to suppress child trafficking. Côte d'Ivoire had also been one of the first States to sign, ratify or accede to various conventions on the protection of the rights of children, inter alia the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages, the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others and ILO Conventions Nos. 138 and 182.

4. At the national level, his Government — on the basis of its Criminal Code — punished and penalized perpetrators of the aforementioned crimes. Police and gendarmerie controls had helped detain traffickers, who were usually sentenced to between 5 and 10 years in prison. The last component of his Government's policy on the matter was to provide social and psychological rehabilitation for "freed" children, for which the Ministry of the Family, Women and Children was responsible, before handing them over to the diplomatic and consular authorities of their countries of origin.

5. The protection of the life and rights of children was an unavoidable responsibility of the international community. His delegation backed all the initiatives that had been taken by both the United Nations and civil society organizations in that regard.

6. **Mr. Luria** (Israel) said that in recent years the entire world had redefined its approach towards children's rights. Now that the correlation between human rights and children's rights had been established, children were the subjects of independent rights rather than an object of the rights of others.

7. His Government considered children's rights to be a top priority and the Knesset (Israel's Parliament) had enacted more than twenty bills in that regard. Every child in Israel was guaranteed the right to health insurance and education. His Government cooperated in that regard with the powerful and effective non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that defended the rights of the child through a wide range of activities relating to the dissemination of information, the promotion of child-welfare legislation and the provision of services to abused children.

8. With a view to incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child into national legislation, his Government had established the Rotlevy Committee which, in addition to its initial task, had taken on the role of bringing about a change in the status of Israeli children. In September 2003, the Committee had submitted to the Government its full report including significant recommendations.

9. In its concluding observations of 2 October 2002, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had welcomed

the work of the Rotlevy Committee and commended Israel for establishing various parliamentary committees dedicated to advancing the rights of children. It had also commended the active involvement of Israeli civil society in that area.

10. The recommendations of the Rotlevy Committee had been distributed to all the members of the Israeli Parliament and were expected to trigger public debate. The recommendations stated, inter alia, that the State must prohibit discrimination against children from different sectors of society and advance equality between them. Differential treatment was therefore sometimes required. The recommendations also referred to the fact that Israel was a multicultural society and to the importance of respecting the cultural tradition of each child as a way of developing his or her identity.

11. At the international level, Israel was a signatory to the two Optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as to the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, with a view to ratifying them in the near future.

12. Israel was currently facing a particularly difficult security situation. More than 100 Israeli children had been killed and many more had been maimed or orphaned since the violence had started in September 2000. Owing to attacks by Palestinian terrorist organizations, Israel had been forced to develop extensive expertise in order to deal with children who had suffered trauma. He concluded by emphasizing that it was imperative that children should not be drawn into the conflict.

13. **Mr. Taranda** (Belarus) said that the best way to ensure both sustained development and peace and security was to promote and protect the rights and well-being of children. Unfortunately, the international community was far from reaching the desired goals. It was therefore opportune to evaluate the experience acquired since the 1990 World Summit for Children as well as the outcome of the twenty-seventh special session on children. More specifically, the Declaration and Plan of Action in the "A World Fit for Children" agenda adopted at the special session provided a stepping-stone for long-term international cooperation on achieving the objectives of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its optional protocols.

14. Some of the major problems continuing to affect the well-being of children included violence and discrimination, homelessness, increased juvenile delinquency and the growing incidence of HIV/AIDS and drug addiction.

15. During the past decade, the Government of Belarus had drawn up a State policy aimed at creating the necessary conditions to promote and protect children's rights; improve their social and legal status; and provide assistance to children most in need. It had adopted a law on children's rights and had implemented a national plan of action. It had also established a National Commission on the Rights of the Child to coordinate government social policy on children's rights and had drawn up a national human-rights-education programme, which included the promotion and protection of children's rights. Child-health services had been improved, following the adoption of the "Children of Belarus" programme proposed by the President. Child health had been a government priority ever since the Chernobyl accident, which had left more than 400,000 victims under the age of 18, approximately 40,000 of whom were under 14.

16. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) was implementing a variety of projects in Belarus, including the prevention of iodine-deficiency diseases, the fight against HIV/AIDS, the prevention of drug addiction and juvenile delinquency and the establishment of shelters for children. The Government was grateful to UNICEF for its general assistance, and specifically for its Belarus programme, which would be implemented beginning on 22 October 2003 after the Government and UNICEF had signed a joint plan of action for 2003-2005.

17. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that the implementation of decisions adopted at the twenty-seventh special session on children required systematic efforts and an exchange of experiences. As a country which aspired to contribute to the establishment of a world fit for children, Belarus was proud of the international community's initiatives and was ready to participate in dialogues with all stakeholders.

18. **Mr. Schurti** (Liechtenstein) said that the discrepancy between existing norms and their implementation was particularly visible in the field of children's rights. Although the Convention on the

Rights of the Child had more State parties than any other international treaty, the world remained an unsafe place for children, and the international community still had not succeeded in protecting their most basic rights.

19. The Convention was a precise legal instrument which focused on the best interests of children, non-discrimination, development and participation. Its optional protocols clearly defined the steps that should be taken to eradicate the involvement of children in armed conflicts, the sale of children, prostitution and child pornography. Individual States were responsible for protecting and promoting children's rights within their territory, while the international community was responsible for monitoring the situation of children throughout the world, in order to give effective guidance and strengthen the promotion and protection of children's rights. In that regard, Liechtenstein welcomed the enlargement of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The increased membership would reinforce the Committee's geographical representation and multisectoral expertise and facilitate its ability to monitor the implementation of the optional protocols. Liechtenstein remained open to any new measures that would assist the Committee in its work, including the establishment of two chambers for a more efficient division of labour, provided that such measures did not hinder the Committee's legitimacy and authority. Liechtenstein was grateful to the Committee for having considered the country reports and appreciated its useful and relevant comments on HIV/AIDS and children's rights, adolescent health and development in the context of the Convention, and general measures for the implementation of the Convention.

20. Liechtenstein welcomed the appointment of an independent expert who would study the prevalence and causes of violence against children, as called for by the General Assembly in 2001. The study would not only prove useful to the Committee on the Rights of the Child but would also provide information which could assist States in fulfilling their obligations.

21. He pointed out that the issue of children in armed conflicts continued to deserve special attention. His delegation had read the Special Representative's report with great interest and admired his achievements. It was pleased that the Security Council had requested a complete list of parties to conflicts who recruited child soldiers and that it had ordered the deployment of child-protection advisers in peacekeeping operations. Liechtenstein reiterated that the entire United Nations system should increase its efforts to combat the violation of the rights of children in armed conflicts. It hoped to have the opportunity in the near future to consider the assessment of the effectiveness and scope of the United Nations' response to the problem which had been requested by the General Assembly, and remained convinced that the assessment would contain practical recommendations for strengthening and sustaining the protection of children in armed conflicts.

22. **Mr. Alexandre** (Haiti) fully supported the statement made by the representative of Barbados on behalf of the members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and said that his country attached great importance to child-related issues. For that reason, and despite the economic sanctions and the socio-political problems in his country, the authorities had adopted measures in favour of children, who were the men and women of tomorrow. Those measures included a reduction in the cost of health care and some medicines, as a result of which the under-five mortality rate had declined. Since 1996, a national health policy had been in force under which minimum services were provided for the entire population, in particular children.

23. In the education sector, his Government had drawn up a national plan which identified four priority areas for a more effective education system. In 2003, in cooperation with the Inter-American Development Bank, a programme had been launched to improve the quality of basic education for seven- to eleven-year-olds, in particular in the most disadvantaged areas. Education was one of the priorities of his Government which, despite the country's serious economic problems, had made a huge effort to improve children's access to education. It had also extended the school lunch programme and distributed coupons for purchasing school equipment.

24. Other significant advances aimed at benefiting children included setting up a hotline for children (SOS Timoun), increasing community dining rooms, approving a law banning corporal punishment, appointing a children's magistrate, implementing other legal instruments to combat all forms of violence against children and child abuse, and setting up a museum of works of art by children and a radio station.

25. One problem hindering those projects was the freezing of international aid, which had resulted in a

deterioration in the living conditions of people most in need, the most vulnerable of whom were children. The difficult economic situation in the country prevented the authorities from continuing with existing projects or starting new ones, such as the reopening of centres for street children and children who were used as domestics, and the establishment of a juvenile crime section in the National Police Department.

26. There was still a long way to go to improve the situation of children, in particular with regard to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which affected child survival and development. Chronic poverty continued to be a major obstacle and needed to be overcome in order for the rights of the child to be fully respected. His Government remained resolved to adopt initiatives to ensure that Haiti would be a country worthy of its children.

27. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Iceland) urged those States which had not yet done so to accede to and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and those States parties with reservations to withdraw them as soon as possible. It was not enough to ratify the Convention; it was also necessary to take practical measures to fully implement its provisions. Her country, which had ratified the Convention and its two Optional Protocols, was preparing a comprehensive national child rights policy. She welcomed the increase in the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and hoped it would contribute to the efficiency of the Committee's work.

28. The substantial increase in the number of children living in institutions in many parts of the world was a matter of great concern. The rights of children in such institutions and the standards of care had not received appropriate attention. Recent research demonstrated that children living in institutions were often subject to ill-treatment and abuse and that in many cases the conditions in which they lived, especially in larger institutions, were appalling. Her country believed there was a good cause for the United Nations, on the basis of the Convention, to identify the basic rights of children living in institutions and recommend monitoring procedures.

29. The number of unaccompanied children had also increased in some parts of the world. Such children were often deported to their country of origin without an appropriate assessment of their needs. Unfortunately that also meant that no arrangements were made to ensure that the child would be cared for properly in his/her country of origin. Such a practice was in conflict with the basic principle of the best interests of the child embodied in the Convention.

30. In March 2003, representatives from 14 States, including Iceland, had met in Stockholm to discuss the plight of unaccompanied children. It had been agreed that, before an unaccompanied child was returned to his/her country of origin, it was important to ensure that measures had been taken to receive and care for the child. The countries had committed themselves to cooperating bilaterally and multilaterally in order to facilitate the establishment of national contact points on issues of unaccompanied children. It was important for that initiative to be extended to other parts of the world in order to promote effective cooperation and protect vulnerable children.

31. Finally, she informed the Committee that UNICEF planned to establish a national office in Iceland in November 2003 and that her Government fully supported and welcomed that initiative.

32. **Mrs. Mills** (Jamaica) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Barbados on behalf of CARICOM and said that it was only through multidimensional policies that the goal of advancing the welfare of children and young people could be achieved. As the Secretary-General had acknowledged, to that end it was important to ensure the participation of all stakeholders — Governments, civil society, the private sector and the United Nations system. The role of UNICEF in child advocacy and in providing humanitarian assistance and education and support for health care for children was particularly noteworthy.

33. She also commended the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and welcomed the appointment of the independent expert who would lead the study on violence against children.

34 Jamaica remained a strong advocate of the rights of children at the national, regional and international levels. As a State party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol, her country honoured its obligations and took practical steps to achieve the goals and targets of the special session of the General Assembly on children. Accordingly, her country had developed a comprehensive approach to children's issues. The process had involved national consultations with key players, including the

Government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and youth representatives. A key milestone had been the development of the first Plan of Action for Children. Other policies included a national youth policy, a national poverty eradication policy and programme of action, and programmes to assist children with disabilities. A draft act on the protection of children and young people, the most far-reaching and comprehensive legislation to have been drawn up in Jamaica, would shortly be adopted. In addition, a special training programme had been designed to assist street children. In December 2002, the Child Development Agency — an umbrella organization incorporating policy agencies with responsibility for children's issues — had been established; one of its main responsibilities was to supervise the operations of children's homes in Jamaica.

35. **Mr. Radhakrishnan** (India) said that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, in the section of his report entitled "The way forward: an agenda for action", had put forward a series of recommendations to which his delegation would give careful consideration. For the time being, he would make a number of general comments. For example, in the subsection on monitoring and reporting, the Special Representative had included a list of instruments and standards that he believed constituted the basis for monitoring. However, some of those instruments did not command universal acceptance or adherence. He wished to know how the Special Representative expected to monitor the situation of a Member State that was not a party to the Optional Protocol, the Statute of the International Criminal Court or ILO Convention No. 182. Such a Member State, while otherwise committed to the standards and obligations concerning the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, would be right to maintain that it was not bound by an instrument to which it was not a party. The Special Representative must recognize that he could not seek to impose standards derived from non-universal instruments on such a Member State.

36. His country had other concerns about the monitoring and reporting programme. Well-established machinery already existed for dealing with alleged human rights violations by the Government of a State that was a party to a specific human rights instrument. The procedures in that respect were well-known and time-honoured. However, the likely interface between such a procedure and the monitoring-reporting mechanism that would come into existence as a result of the Special Representative's recommendations was not at all clear. Moreover, the treaty bodies had their own systems for dealing with non-compliance with treaty obligations. There was therefore a danger of duplication and overlap. The international community was a very long way from meeting the ambitious objectives it had laid down in 1990, the year in which the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been opened for signature. In 10 years it had not been possible to reduce maternal mortality rates or under-five child mortality and malnutrition rates by as much as had been hoped. Nor had there been a significant increase in the access of children to drinking water and basic education. When addressing the situation of children, it was therefore important to maintain a balance between the rights-based approach and developmental aspects.

37. It was clear that, if the international community wished to achieve more positive and robust results with regard to the situation of children, it would have to redirect its efforts significantly and rapidly, as the rights of the child could not be realized in a developmental vacuum. It was therefore imperative that the international community should focus on the real challenges, such as poverty, hunger, malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, illiteracy and exploitation, that millions of children faced every day around the world.

38. **Mr. Felix** (Dominican Republic) said that his country was fully aware that protecting children was a way of ensuring that future generations would witness the long-awaited arrival of sustainable development. For that reason, in 1991 his country had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and since then had redoubled its efforts to apply the doctrine of the integral protection of children through policies and programmes designed to address children's basic needs. To that end, the Government had consolidated its efforts in a body entitled the Executive Technical Office of the Governing Body of the System of Protection for Boys, Girls and Adolescents, which aimed to prevent child abuse by supervising homes, orphanages, child detention centres and other entities that came within its competence.

39. The Government had significantly stepped up the allocation of resources to the National Children's Council (CONANI), which had enabled it to protect the children in its care more effectively and to open more

centres. The Council's current objective was to provide proper care and education for, and to protect and promote the health of, children and adolescents living in marginalized communities, with a view to helping to reduce poverty levels. As a way of reaffirming the Government's commitment to giving children a better life, the Dominican Republic had recently hosted the XII Conference of First Ladies, Spouses and Representatives of Heads of State and Government of the Americas, which had agreed to focus on education as the key to breaking the poverty cycle among children.

40. The Strategic and Operative Plan for 2000-2002 set out objectives and courses of action relating to the development of programmes and services for children, with emphasis on the family and the community. It also included a programme for developing and training human resources and strengthening social participation, the blueprint for an information, education and communication strategy, and measures aimed at reorganizing and modernizing programmes in order to extend the cover of services.

41. In a determined effort to combat the worst forms of child labour, in 2002 the State Secretariat for Labour had initiated the second phase of the programme on the elimination of child labour. To that end, the National Steering Committee to Combat Child Labour had been strengthened and enlarged, and a publicity campaign entitled "*A los niños el trabajo les queda grande*" had been carried out in an effort to prevent children being forced or pressurized to work because of their social exclusion. Technical and financial support had also been given to various civil society organizations that contributed to the elimination of child labour. Of course, such progress would not have been possible without the contribution and solidarity of the international organizations and friendly countries that supported such initiatives to help vulnerable children.

42. **Mr. MacKay** (New Zealand) said that the nearly universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a potent demonstration of the commitment of Governments to the promotion and protection of children's rights in all countries. New Zealand was a party to the Convention and to the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict; it had also signed the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography and had initiated work to enable ratification as soon as possible. It was also a party to the ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. The most important implication of those commitments was the obligation to give priority to the best interests of the child in all Government actions.

43. As the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members, the family should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance to assume all its responsibilities. Priority should therefore be placed on the role of parents, legal guardians and other caregivers.

44. In its second periodic report under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which it had recently submitted, New Zealand had outlined the practical measures it had taken to fulfil its commitments. Since violence against children continued to be an area of concern, his Government was implementing a family violence prevention strategy and was launching a public education strategy to change attitudes towards physical discipline of children. Recognizing the existence of many different types of family structure, it had also invested in capacity-building of Maori family, tribal and community organizations.

45. New Zealand remained gravely concerned about the abuses of children's rights which were taking place in other parts of the world. Millions of children worked full-time, especially in Asia, often as bonded child labourers. Many continued to be direct participants in war; as a result, they were often denied a childhood and subjected to horrific psychological and physical violence. New Zealand welcomed the efforts of the United Nations to address those very serious problems; it particularly welcomed the reports prepared by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and the mainstreaming of children's issues throughout the work of the United Nations.

46. Children living without family support deserved special attention. Millions of children all over the world faced poverty, hunger, malnutrition and exploitation, and many of them were facing such challenges alone or without adequate support from their families, communities and public authorities. The HIV/AIDS pandemic, armed conflicts and other problems were creating generations of orphans; refugee

children were often separated from their families and street children lived without supervision or protection from adults. New Zealand urged all States to put such children first and to give them, to the extent possible, the support that their parents were not able to provide.

47. New Zealand had been a long-standing supporter of the Committee resolutions on the rights of the child, the International Year of the Family, and the girl child, which provided a platform for advancing debate within the General Assembly. Their underlying principle was that the best interests of the child must always be paramount. It was time to put words into action and proceed to an era of application.

48. **Mr. Gansukh** (Mongolia) said that one of the greatest challenges currently facing the international community was child protection and development. The almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was a clear manifestation of the concern and commitment of the countries of the world to the promotion and protection of those rights. For the first time in history, all rights of children were protected by international law. It was also gratifying that the two Optional Protocols to the Convention had entered into force and that the process of accession and ratification of those instruments was continuing rapidly. The World Summit for Children, held in 1990, had adopted the Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for its implementation and, in 2003, at its special session on children, the General Assembly had reviewed the achievements of the past decade and formulated the policy and goals of the new millennium in the Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "*A world fit for children*". Those endeavours demonstrated the strong political will of the international community to ensure that every child was able to enjoy a better future. However, much still remained to be done, and all Member States should therefore implement specific action plans, mainstream issues relating to children within their policies and activities, and develop partnership and cooperation at the national and international levels.

49. A key factor to achieving that goal was the full realization of the right to education. Regrettably, over 100 million children, 60 per cent of whom were girls, had no access to primary schooling, which had an impact on their development. The Millennium Declaration and the United Nations Literacy Decade reflected the commitment of States Members of the United Nations to promote education for all. It was therefore to be hoped that they would make substantial progress in promoting that right during the Decade.

50. Another important issue was the elimination of child labour. According to data from ILO, 246 million children worked, many of them in situations of intolerable exploitation, and many died in work-related accidents. His delegation associated itself with the view that the key tools in combating the problem were free, accessible and good-quality education and the adoption of core labour standards. Universal ratification of and compliance with ILO Convention No. 182, on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, and No. 138, on the minimum age for admission to employment, were of particular significance in that regard. Mongolia had ratified both Conventions in 2000 and had signed a memorandum of understanding with ILO with a view to their implementation.

51. The family was the fundamental unit of society and the primary environment for the development of children; families should therefore be provided with all necessary assistance and resources for the care and protection of their children. In that respect, Mongolia supported the appeal that, during the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, every effort should be made to recognize the social role of the family and to improve parental involvement and education in order to ensure the best interests of children.

52. After the special session of the General Assembly on children, Mongolia had established the goal of making the country fit for children and, in December 2002, it had approved a national programme of action for the development and protection of children, developed with the participation and support of UNICEF. That important document covered a wide range of priority issues such as health, nutrition, development, education, social protection and participation, and protection of the rights of children and of their living environment, and placed special emphasis on forging partnerships with stakeholders.

53. Mongolia attached great importance to the active participation of children themselves in the process of democratization and reform which was taking place and reiterated its commitment to achieve the goals and objectives established at the special session of the General Assembly on children through its national

programme, its participation in regional and international programmes and its cooperation with other Member States, the United Nations and non-governmental organizations.

54. **Mr. Zhang** Lei (China) said that children were the future of mankind and that there was a broad consensus among all countries on promoting and protecting their rights. However, despite the efforts made by the United Nations and Governments, and the remarkable results achieved, the current situation did not inspire optimism. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, over 100 million children had no access to education and more than 10 million died every year from preventable diseases. Every day the rights of children were violated in armed conflicts and every day children were the victims of drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, sexual exploitation and child labour.

55. The success of the special session of the General Assembly on children, held in New York in 2002, demonstrated the importance that the countries of the world attached to child-related issues. In the Conference's outcome document entitled "*A world fit for children*", the participating States had made a commitment to children and established objectives to that end. His country called on all countries to act in accordance with that document, and to make the interests of children their primary consideration in order to create a favourable environment and thereby ensure a happy and healthy life for every child in the world.

56. His country, which had always attached great importance to the protection of the rights of the child, had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its two optional protocols, and Convention No. 182 of the International Labour Organization concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. In 1995, the Committee on the Rights of the Child had fully endorsed his Government's efforts after reviewing its first report on the implementation of the Convention. On the basis of that Committee's comments and suggestions, and after extensive consultations with the relevant departments and non-governmental organizations, his Government had prepared its second report, submitting it to the Committee in June 2003.

57. His country reiterated its commitment to giving priority to children, implementing the recommendations and decisions of the special session of the General Assembly on children, and promoting the protection, development and participation of children. His country was also ready to work tirelessly with all countries to ensure a brighter future for children throughout the world.

58. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for Palestine) said that the collective obligation to promote and protect the rights of the child, as recognized at the special session of the General Assembly on children, was extremely important as children continued to be the most vulnerable members of society. Such vulnerability increased in situations of poverty, violence, war and armed conflict, including foreign occupation. Palestinian children knew all too well the grave effects of armed conflict for they had lived their entire lives under a brutal Israeli occupation, which had become a vicious form of colonialism. The occupation had robbed Palestinian children of their basic and inalienable human rights and had been extremely detrimental to their well-being, safety and development. That impact had been compounded over the last three years, during which the occupying forces had committed countless war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations.

59. Fifty-three per cent of the Palestinian population were aged 18 and under. Forty-two per cent of those children lived in refugee camps, commonly the sites of Israel's concentrated and brutal attacks. Palestinian children had borne the brunt of Israeli actions; they had suffered killings, raids, destruction and detention, and had been denied access to education and medical care. They had also suffered physical and psychological trauma, the devastating effects of which would be felt for years to come. The soaring rates of unemployment and poverty in the occupied territories further worsened living conditions for children.

60. The war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations committed by the Israeli occupying forces had resulted in the death of 2,580 Palestinian civilians, 600 of whom were children under the age of 18. The majority of those children had been killed when no confrontations were occurring or during protests or symbolic acts of resistance, such as throwing stones. In addition, many Palestinian children had suffered injuries or been permanently disfigured or disabled.

61. The health of thousands of Palestinian children continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate. According to the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, more than 22 per cent of children under the age of five suffered from malnutrition as a result of the deepening humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinian people.

62. Israel's policies in the occupied territories and the measures and actions taken by the Israeli occupying forces constituted flagrant violations of humanitarian law and international law, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the various declarations on the protection of children, as well as the fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts. Regrettably, Palestinian children remained the only children in the world today who did not enjoy the rights contained in those instruments. Palestinian children needed to be free, to live peacefully in their own independent State and to enjoy all their rights. Their current situation under Israeli occupation bore no resemblance to the ideal of "a world fit for children". The Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine urged the international community and the Third Committee to take the necessary measures to end Israel's aggression against the Palestinian population and its children.

63. **Mr. Tesfu** (Ethiopia) said that, since 40 per cent of his country's population were children and young people, his Government had made issues affecting children one of the main focuses of its development agenda. It had demonstrated its commitment to the cause of children by endorsing and ratifying several international conventions and bringing national law and practices into line with them. It had ratified and incorporated into national law the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Abolition of Forced Labour, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. As part of his Government's efforts to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Parliament had recently ratified the ILO Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Great importance had also been given to the adoption of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention, on the involvement of children in armed conflicts and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and preliminary activities were under way to ratify them.

64. In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, his Government had taken concrete measures to promote and protect the rights of children in Ethiopia and to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known to adults and children through, for example, conferences, workshops and seminars, radio and television programmes, and publications. Committees had also been established at the national and regional level to monitor the implementation of the Convention.

65. Article 36 of his country's Constitution, on the rights of children, provided that every child had the right to life, to a name and nationality, not to be subject to exploitative practices and to be free of corporal punishment or cruel or inhumane treatment. Both the Civil Code and the Penal Code contained articles on the protection of the rights of children. The newly revised family law had also been brought into line with the Convention. In addition, measures had been taken with regard to the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, pursuant to article 29 (d) of the Convention. One such measure was the introduction of a civic education course into the country's secondary school curriculum.

66. National policies and development programmes emphasizing the well-being of children had also been adopted and implemented in the health, education, population and other sectors. The 1993 health policy and the long-term health sector development plan framework gave special emphasis to the needs of the family, particularly women and children. The national plan to prevent and control HIV/AIDS included the prevention of mother-to-child transmission and provided care for children orphaned and affected by the epidemic.

67. Providing free primary education for all children had been the most effective strategy to raise the enrolment rate, which had reached 65 per cent in 2003.

68. The special session of the General Assembly on children had been a crucial step forward in protecting and promoting the rights of the child. His country was

in the process of incorporating into its national policies and programmes the commitments made in the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in its final outcome document, "*A world fit for children*".

69. It was encouraging to see the international community pay increasing attention to the cause of children. In particular, the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had made it the most important human rights instrument. However, despite the many existing international agreements, the situation of children all over the world remained fragile. The rights of the child were still being violated in various ways throughout the world, making children victims of child labour, armed conflict, sexual exploitation, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and chronic poverty. To overcome such problems, their underlying causes needed to be addressed. The international community had a clear vision and a common platform of action to give children a better life; it must therefore demonstrate determination, political will and solidarity and make that vision a reality. He called on the international community and the developed world in particular to stand by their commitments and assist poor nations in securing better lives for all children.

70. **Mr. Tidjani** (Cameroon) had noted in particular the depressing statistics concerning the situation of children provided in previous statements and said that it was clearly time to take action. The international community had made a commitment to give children a better world. To that end, it had created an integrated network of instruments based on new fundamental principles and new ways of promoting and protecting the rights of the child, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, the International Criminal Court, the ILO Convention concerning the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour, numerous Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, and the Declaration and Plan of Action contained in the final outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly on children. However, all those initiatives would be useless unless they were based on the genuine will of all States to adopt appropriate political measures to reduce or eliminate the evils facing children. In order to be effective, such initiatives must be underpinned by full international cooperation and, more specifically, respect for developing countries, where extreme poverty, despair and the quest for power, when not generating armed conflicts in which children participated as soldiers, created the conditions for them to be exploited through prostitution, pornography and drug networks, organ trafficking and the worst forms of child labour. Moreover, children and women continued to be the social groups that were most vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

71. A number of previous speakers had stressed the need to adopt urgent measures at the national and international level. In that regard, his delegation, without wishing to establish an order of priority, considered that the international community should intensify its support for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, an area in which progress made did not meet expectations. Nonetheless, his delegation welcomed the fact that those programmes had defined specific standards to take account of cultural characteristics and thereby protect the dignity of child soldiers, particularly girls, as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his report on the follow-up to the United Nations special session on children (A/58/333). His delegation also believed that the new international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities should be finalized and include specific provisions on children.

72. His country had acceded to almost all the international legal instruments on the protection and promotion of the rights of the child. In line with the recommendations of the 1990 World Summit for Children, his Government had adopted a National Plan of Action in which priority was given to early childhood, the fight against malnutrition, universal basic education, equal opportunities for boys and girls, protection of children in difficult situations, importance of the family unit in education, prevention of mother-to-child HIV/AIDS transmission and psychological support for children infected or orphaned by HIV/AIDS.

73. Moreover, although his country had not yet been affected by the phenomenon of sex tourism, in 1998 it had adopted a law on tourism which provided for ongoing coordination between the State, tourist agencies, non-governmental organizations and civil society to combat the economic exploitation of children, as well as close cooperation between all States in the subregion.

74. A number of other equally important provisions had also been adopted, such as national vaccination

days and ongoing booster immunization programmes against endemic and incapacitating diseases. His country attached particular importance to education, making it the key component of its policy on the protection of the rights of the child. It was convinced that investing in children's education was the best way to build the country's future.

75. Despite the fact that his country was currently experiencing economic problems, the President of the Republic had instructed the Government to take measures to combat the vicious circle of ignorance, illiteracy, idleness and crime. Such measures included support for private education, free primary education as of September 2000 and a basic programme, supported by UNICEF, which placed particular emphasis on education for girls and had subsequently been extended with good results to refugee children. While his country had made huge progress concerning the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, it was still a long way from meeting all the commitments made. His delegation called on the international community to remain firm in its mission to create a world fit for children.

76. **Ms. Sriphiromya** (Thailand) said that her country was fully committed to promoting a world fit for children. Her Government had given constant attention to the protection of the rights of the child. Improving the living conditions and well-being of children was at the heart of national economic and social development strategies.

77. Her country was convinced that education was a prerequisite for child development. In addition to providing 12 years of compulsory education for all children, her Government had taken steps to reform the education system with a view to further developing the country's human resources. It had also attempted to facilitate access to information technology as a means of education in the interior of the country, and had provided computers and organized courses on information technology for schools in provincial areas with a view to bridging the digital divide between children in cities and those in rural areas.

78. Children in developing countries continued to be affected by the spread of HIV/AIDS. It was crucial to intervene at an early age in order to prevent future generations from being infected. At the same time, it was necessary to meet the special needs of children affected by HIV/AIDS, protect their rights against all forms of discrimination and stigmatization, and closely monitor progress made. She was therefore very pleased that the Secretary-General's report (A/58/184) on progress towards implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS had noted her country's efforts regarding the prevention of mother-to-child transmission. According to the figures given in the report, the number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS could reach 25 million in 2015. Such a disturbing increase would have a negative economic and social impact on the entire population of affected countries; her delegation therefore called on the international community to take urgent action to reverse that trend. While recognizing the serious situation in Africa, her delegation warned that the number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS was also increasing in the Mekong subregion. If left unresolved, the problem could seriously hinder the economic and social development of countries in that subregion.

79. Her Government attached great importance to protecting children against all kinds of violence. It was in the process of drafting a Child Protection Act with the aim of establishing a legal system and a network of services to protect children at the local, regional and national level. The purpose of the Act was to establish the minimum standard of care to which a child was entitled and to specify the punitive measures applicable to anyone who violated their rights. The Act had been drafted in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and was non-discriminatory in its orientation. As a result, all children in her country — whether of Thai or any other nationality — were equally protected by the Act.

80. Her country was fully committed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which it had been a party since 1992. Her delegation shared concerns about the backlog in the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and would support any attempts by that Committee to adjust its working methods in order to exercise its mandate effectively. Such action would contribute significantly to improving the situation of children around the world.

81. **Mr. Paclisanu** (International Committee of the Red Cross) pointed to progress made on the legal protection of child victims of armed conflict. So far, 54 countries had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. However, in

many countries, children continued to be separated from their families and were recruited as soldiers, assassinated, injured or raped. The situation of child victims of war was just as serious in 2003 as in previous years.

82. It was the duty of the International Committee of the Red Cross to work impartially to assist all victims of armed conflict and internal disturbances, according to their needs. Children, including child soldiers, warranted special attention. The Committee was doing everything possible to prevent children being recruited by armed forces or armed groups. In their day-to-day work, Committee delegates strove to prevent families from being torn apart by war. To protect children who had been separated from their parents or the people responsible for them, delegates identified the children concerned and placed them temporarily in the care of an adult or institution. They then looked for the children's relatives and, wherever possible, re-established contact between them until they could be reunited once more. In order to locate families dispersed by conflicts, the Committee relied on the support of 80 delegations and missions, as well as a network — the only one of its kind in the world — of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

83. Every year, thousands of children were deprived of their freedom as a result of their participation in hostilities and specific measures were therefore needed to protect them. Committee delegates strove, in particular, to persuade the authorities holding power to separate minors in detention from adults, give them adequate food, medical care and education, and allow them to maintain direct, regular and frequent contact with their families.

84. When a war ended, the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers were essential conditions for reconstructing societies torn apart by violence. Peace agreements needed to attach particular importance to the needs of children and provide social, psychological and medical measures for them. The demobilization, rehabilitation and social reintegration of child soldiers was one of the most serious and crucial concerns of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The Committee worked closely with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the National Societies and other humanitarian organizations to draw up specific reintegration measures that were specially adapted to local conditions. In particular, the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society, with the support of various components of the Movement — inter alia the International Committee of the Red Cross — was running a rehabilitation programme aimed at facilitating the social reintegration of children and raising awareness among their communities. The project targeted, among others, former child soldiers who did not benefit from official demobilization and rehabilitation programmes, many of whom were girls.

85. The protection of child victims of war was, above all, an obligation that international law placed on all States. The special protection of children in armed conflict was enshrined in over 40 articles of the Geneva Conventions and its Additional Protocols. Further obligations were laid down in legal instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It was important for States to accede to the legal instruments on the protection of children and, above all, for those instruments to be implemented and respected.

86. The International Committee of the Red Cross reiterated its determination to cooperate with all States and all the relevant national and international institutions to ensure that international humanitarian law was respected. The Committee offered its advisory services to all States to assist them in drafting legislation to implement international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol. The Committee called on all States to fulfil their obligation and not only respect and implement the above instruments, but also promote their dissemination.

87. **Mr. Husain** (Organization of the Islamic Conference) said that his organization generally shared the conclusions of the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the United Nations special session on children (A/58/333). In particular, referring to paragraph 13 of the report, he stated that there had been good progress in follow-up to the special session in several States members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and, referring to paragraph 44, he said that the focus on programmatic support and inter-agency collaboration, advocacy, communication strategies, resource mobilization and building partnerships and alliances had been useful in helping OIC to cooperate with the United Nations system in implementing the United Nations Declaration and Plan of Action entitled "*A world fit for children*".

88. A substantial number of the 140 countries that had taken concrete actions to translate commitments into national action plans and/or to integrate them into existing plans and policies were States members of OIC. Their collaboration and that of the relevant institutions — in particular the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) — with UNICEF was helping to integrate the Plan of Action into national plans and policies, poverty reduction strategies and sectoral policies. However, OIC States members faced challenges such as scarcity of resources, institutional weaknesses and, in some instances, attitudinal barriers that could be met only with the support and cooperation of the United Nations system and partners in development.

89. His organization shared the view of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict that, while there had been a significant increase in advocacy and awareness, the situation for children remained grave and precarious in war zones. Among the States members of OIC, the worst affected areas were in Somalia, Sierra Leone, the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan, and the State of Jammu and Kashmir. In some of those areas, peace processes were beginning to have an effect. His organization continued to look to the United Nations for an effective, just and permanent solution to those and other conflicts, so that peace and tranquillity could return to the affected areas and children could have a better future.

90. The 30th session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers (ICFM), held in Tehran (Islamic Republic of Iran) in May 2003, had adopted a resolution on child care and protection in the Islamic world. The resolution had called on the States members, inter alia, to take all necessary measures to prevent armed conflicts and to provide particular care for children and women, who were the main victims of conflict; to continue to strive to guarantee the human rights of children of both sexes, as the best way of achieving social justice; to take the necessary measures to protect children from harmful mass media programmes and to support programmes that promoted the cultural, moral and ethical values of children; and to combat child trafficking through awareness-raising, capacity-building of law-enforcement agencies, and the setting up of rescue and rehabilitation centres for the victims.

91. The resolution demonstrated the commonality of policies and approaches that was developing between the United Nations and OIC with regard to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. His organization would continue to work with the United Nations on agreed polices and programmes aimed at improving the situation of children now and in the future.

92. **Ms. Davtyan** (Armenia), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that her delegation had so far demonstrated maximum self-restraint and constructivism, in the hope that the delegation of Azerbaijan would adopt a more responsible, sober-headed attitude once the presidential elections were over. However, given that the situation had not improved, her delegation felt compelled to respond to the groundless accusations against it.

93. In reference to the so-called "military aggression of Armenia", the conflict had never been between her country and Azerbaijan, but between Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. The resulting situation, referred to by the representative of Azerbaijan, was a forced reaction of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan's use of military force to suppress their legitimate, just and peaceful quest to exercise their right to self-determination.

94. With regard to the so-called "aggression lasting already for fifteen years", the real aggression was that suffered by the Armenian community in Azerbaijan since 1988, as a result of which thousands of Armenians had been killed or forced to flee the country, leaving behind all their possessions.

95. With regard to camps for refugees and internally displaced persons within the country, the Government of Azerbaijan had exploited the suffering of its own people for propaganda. There was nothing unusual about it again blaming Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh for all its problems, both real and invented. If the Government of Azerbaijan was really interested in resolving the refugee problem, a solution would have been found long ago, especially in the light of its rich oil reserves. It was a tragedy that the Government had instead chosen to exploit refugees as part of its unsophisticated propaganda campaign against her country and Nagorno-Karabakh.

96. **Mr. Luria** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, unfortunately, since the outbreak of terrorist violence in September 2000, his

country had been in a very difficult situation as Palestinian terrorist organizations had increasingly used children in acts of violence and as human shields. Such exploitation and manipulation was a flagrant violation of the basic principles of international law and of the basic rights of the child, and should be a matter of concern to the international community as a whole.

97. Unfortunately, the Palestinian Authority had not taken any steps to prevent children being abused by terrorist organizations. In fact, the cynical manipulation of children was very much rooted in the Palestinian Authority's education system and media, which, instead of promoting peace, taught them hate and violence. In fact, many Israeli children and young people had been innocent victims of the brutal and indiscriminate acts of Palestinian terrorists.

98. The death of any child was a tragedy; above all, it was essential to ensure that both Israeli and Palestinian children could live in a safe environment. Coexistence between the two peoples in the future would depend on them, it was therefore essential not to involve them in the conflict.

99. **Ms. Ajalova** (Azerbaijan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, reiterated that the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijani territories and the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of her country were undeniable facts recognized by the United Nations. Armenia had ignored all calls by the international community to end hostilities.

100. Given that the current meeting was addressing the promotion and protection of the rights of the child, the real causes of the problem needed to be discussed. The occupation of her country had created a humanitarian crisis and the displacement of many people, including children, who were the victims of the worst abuses. She did not intend to waste the Committee's time by responding to the groundless accusations made by the representative of Armenia, as her reply had already been reflected in the relevant Security Council resolutions and in the decisions of other international organizations.

101. **Ms. Rasheed** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the rhetoric used by Israel in saying that Palestinians used children as human shields was yet another manifestation of the deep-rooted racism of the occupying force. Blaming the victims of violence instead of those genuinely responsible was simply an attempt to dehumanize the Palestinian people.

102. With regard to the statement that Palestinians taught children to hate, it should be recalled that Palestinian children had suffered every kind of violation and had grown up under Israeli domination; it was therefore hardly to be expected that they were happy with the situation. Indeed, the origins of hatred were not genetic but social. In the case of Palestinian children, the Israeli occupation alone explained their feelings of hatred. With regard to Palestinian civilians assassinated for security reasons, for Palestians, security — as understood by Israel — apparently meant repression, violation of human rights and killings. Israel was responsible for the destruction of three generations of Palestinians and for the break-up of Palestinian society. Israel should not use its own victims to justify its policy of occupation, oppression and aggression.

103. **Ms. Davtyan** (Armenia) said that Azerbaijan's call for its territorial integrity to be restored was historically, legally and politically deficient since Nagorno-Karabakh had never been part of independent Azerbaijan. The only time when Azerbaijan had exercised sovereignty over the autonomous region of Nagorno-Karabakh had been during the existence of the Soviet Union. Consequently, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the people of Nagorno-Karabakh had exercised their right to self-determination, peacefully and in accordance with existing Soviet laws and international law. With regard to the implementation of the Security Council resolutions on Nagorno-Karabakh, the representative of Azerbaijan was clearly attempting to read and apply those resolutions selectively. Azerbaijan had never acknowledged that Armenia had done exactly what the Security Council resolutions had asked it to do and used its good offices with the Nagorno-Karabakh leadership to help find a peaceful solution to the conflict. Her delegation hoped that, once the presidential elections had been concluded, Azerbaijan would participate in the peace process in a constructive manner.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.